

ATRIUM TOUR

(4) Franciscans in Cincinnati Mural



In 1994 on the 150th anniversary of the arrival in Cincinnati of the first friars from Austria, a book titled "God Gives His Grace – A Short History of St. John the Baptist Province" was written by Fr. **Pat McCloskey, OFM**. A second edition was published in 2001. Excerpts from the Foreword in the 2nd edition, written by the then Provincial Minister, **Fr. Fred Link, OFM** reads as follows:

"Dear Brothers and Sisters in St. Francis,

In 1858, Archbishop John B. Purcell wrote a letter to Minister General Bernardino Trionfetti of Montefranco, rejoicing that the new Franciscan missionaries would be permitted to remain in Cincinnati. Writing about two friars just new to America, he declared, 'We greet as angels the two who are arriving endowed with outstanding testimonies.' The story of St. John the Baptist Province, now given increase through God's amazing grace, is the story of hundreds of 'angels' who, in God's eyes, are all equally 'endowed with outstanding testimonies'...every individual who has been part of St. John the Baptist province and the Vice Province of the Most Holy Savior is integral to the whole history. God graces you and me no less than he did our famous forbears. Our 'testimonies,' though unwritten, are, in the heart of God, just as 'outstanding.' And because we know that God is always faithful, we trust that he will continue to write a glorious history in the lives of the hundreds, perhaps even thousands, of friars who will come after us."

A timeline of the Franciscan friars' efforts in Cincinnati from 1844 until the merger of St. John the Baptist Province into a new national province in 2023, is presented below.

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1844 - Tyrolean Franciscan friars from Austria, led by 35-year-old Franciscan priest Father Wilhelm Unterthiner, arrive in Cincinnati at the invitation of Bishop John Purcell to minister to German immigrants in the Over-the-Rhine neighborhood. Fr. Unterthiner begins work at Holy Trinity Parish.

1844: St. John the Baptist Church is founded. Located at Green and Bremen streets, it was a Franciscan-led parish famous for initiating the St. John Passion Play to pray for the parish's soldiers in World War I. The church closed in 1969.



1848: The friars begin at **St. Stephen Church** in Hamilton, Ohio with the arrival of Father Nicholas Wachter, OFM as pastor. The parish is led by Franciscans until 1989.



Franciscans at St. Stephen, 1923
Rev. Gaudentius Shuster, Br. Bernard Kuper, Rev. Alexander Wilberding,
Rev. Capistran Heitman, Rev. Ethelbert Harrington

1850: Friars found **St. Clement Parish** which serves as the novitiate (1863-70) and until 1930 as a house for philosophy studies. A school and friary are also established at St. Clement.

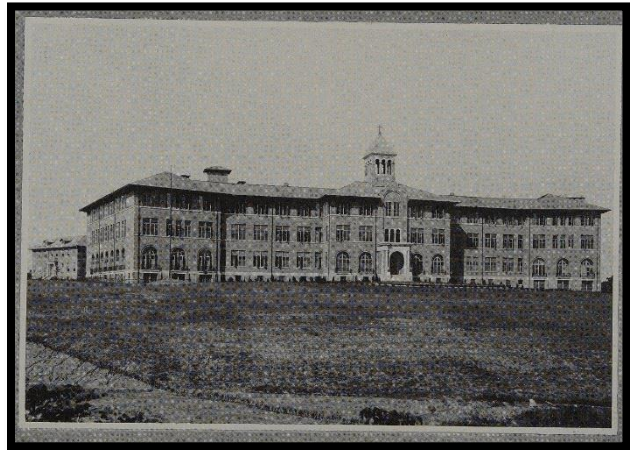


Interior of St. Clement Church prior to the fire of 1962

1851: Friars wear their Franciscan robes publicly for the first time.

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1858: To encourage young men to join the Order, the friars establish St. Franziskus Gymnasium, a high school at Liberty and Vine. It later moved to Republic Street and in 1924, moved to a 127-acre campus in Springfield Township and was renamed **St. Francis Seminary**. During its 122 years of operation, it educated over 4,500 students, including actor Tom Cruise, who attended as a freshman in the late 1970s. The seminary closed in 1980.



1859: St. Francis Seraph Church, located at Liberty and Vine streets, is consecrated. The historic parish is known for its German-style interior, 1860s school, and a crypt. **St. Francis Seraph School** also opened this year. The church closed in 2026.



1859: St. John the Baptist Custody is established as a semiautonomous group of friars.

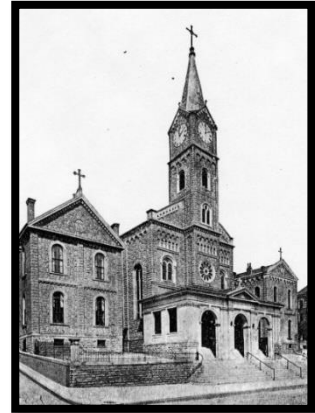
1860: First friars receive the Franciscan habit in Cincinnati.

1860: The **Friars Club**, a historic Cincinnati non-profit dedicated to serving at-risk youth through sports, education, and fitness, is founded in Over-the-Rhine. It moved in the 1930's to Corryville. In 2013, it partnered with Roger Bacon High School to build a new 37,000-square-foot athletic facility in St. Bernard. Today, the Franciscan ministry serves over 1,000 children annually, offering basketball, baseball, and volleyball with a focus on sportsmanship and values.



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1868: St. Bonaventure Parish is established in South Fairmount, Cincinnati. The parish, rooted in the earlier St. Peter's Church (1844), grew to serve a large immigrant community before closing in 2003 after merging with **St. Leo the Great** in North Fairmount. It was demolished in 2004.



1868: St. George Parish (now known as Old St. George), located at 42 Calhoun Street, is formed by the Franciscans to serve German Catholic families moving from Over-the-Rhine to the hilltop suburb of Corryville. The iconic red-brick, Romanesque Revival structure was designed by renowned local architect Samuel Hannaford (who also designed Cincinnati's City Hall and Music Hall). It was dedicated on June 28, 1874. After a devastating fire in 2008, the building reopened in 2016 as Crossroads Uptown, serving as a satellite campus for the multi-site church.

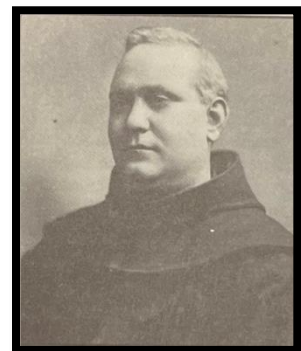


1877: The friars assume chaplaincy at **St. Aloysius Orphanage** and serve until 1893.

1882: The friars assume chaplaincy at **Drake Hospital**.

1885: St. John the Baptist Custody becomes a province of the same name.

1885: Fr. Jerome Kilgenstein OFM becomes the first Provincial of the new St. John the Baptist Province. A renowned preacher, he and Fr. Chrysostom Theobald OFM formed the province's first mission band.



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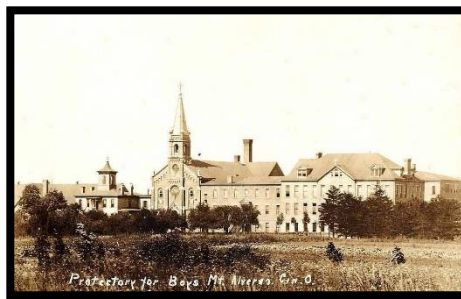
1887: St. Anthony Friary and Shrine is established in Mount Airy to serve as a novitiate and residence for retired friars. The shrine was built on a country estate that was purchased by Joseph and Elizabeth Nurre for \$18,000 and donated to the Franciscan friars. It has been a center for St. Anthony of Padua devotions since 1888.



1893: Friars assume chaplaincy at **St. Francis Hospital** (until 1982) and **Mt. Alverno Protectory for Boys** (until 1972).



St. Francis Hospital, 1896



Mt. Alverno Home for Boys

1893: St. Anthony's Messenger Press publishes the well-known **St. Anthony Messenger** magazine. Over the decades it grew into one of the principal Catholic family magazines in the United States. In 2012, the Press became [Franciscan Media](#) to include print and electronic book publishing, catechetical videos, a syndicated radio program, parish resources, apps and a website. The operations of its legacy ministry, Franciscan Media, concluded in 2025.

1896: Friars assume the chaplaincy at **St. Mary's Hospital** (historically located at the corner of **Linn Street** and **Betts Street**) established by the Sisters of the Poor of St. Francis to serve the poor and immigrant populations of Cincinnati's West End. The hospital operated at this site for over a century until its closure in **1971** when its operations transitioned to the newly opened Providence Hospital.



St. Mary's Hospital, 1896

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1905: Friars assume chaplaincy at **Little Sisters of the Poor Home** (Archbishop Leibold Home)

1906: The new **St. Francis Seraph Friary** is dedicated.

1913: Friars assume chaplaincy at **St. Dymphna Chapel** at Longview State Hospital.

1928: **Roger Bacon High School** opens in St. Bernard with classes at St. Clement Grade School, Our Lady of the Angels High School and the Witte Estate. The first graduating class came from St. George Parish High School.



1928: **Rev. Juvenal Berens OFM** becomes the first Principal at Roger Bacon High School. In addition to serving as the Principal until 1940, he taught English, Ethics/Religion and Public Speaking.



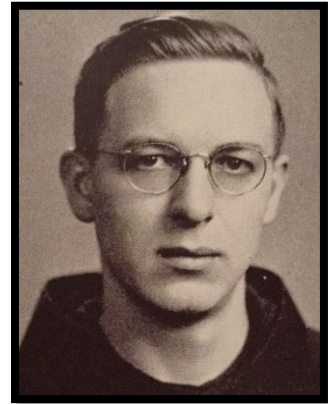
1928: **Our Lady of the Angels High School** opens. The school is staffed primarily by *Sisters of the Third Order Regular of St. Francis* headquartered in Oldenburg, IN. Friars served as part of the staff until the school closed in 1984 when Roger Bacon High School became coeducational.



1944: Friars assume chaplaincy at **Deaconess Hospital** and serve there until 1978.

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1946: Fr. Alan Heet, OFM starts his storied 38-year career at Roger Bacon as a teacher and athletic director (AD) at Roger Bacon. An AD for 34 years, he added the sports of tennis, bowling, cross country, wrestling, and soccer to the Spartan arsenal. In the mid-1950s, he helped spearhead the project stadium construction of Bron Bacevich Memorial Stadium and was instrumental in securing illustrious football coach Bron Bacevich to his staff in 1954. Fr. Alan helped form the Southwest Ohio Athletic Directors Association in 1961 and served as the first President-Elect. Fr. Alan was inducted into Roger Bacon Hall of Fame in 2000 and the Ohio Interscholastic Athletic Administrators Association Hall of Fame in 2023.



1956: Friars assume chaplaincy at the **Mary Reparatrix Convent** between 1956 – 1971 and 1977-1981.

1957: Friars assume chaplaincy at the **Dominican Sisters of the Sick Poor Convent** until 1972.

1958: Corpus Christi Parish in Cincinnati is established by Archbishop Karl J. Alter to serve growing suburban areas, with its initial Masses held at St. Francis Seminary. Entrusted to the Franciscan Friars of St. John the Baptist Province, it served parishioners from Mt. Healthy, Dry Ridge, and Greenhills. In 2002, administration returned to the Archdiocese of Cincinnati. In 2022, it became part of the Blessed Trinity Family of Parishes.



1959: St. Leonard College is formally opened to train young men for the priesthood within the Franciscan Order, specifically the Cincinnati-based St. John the Baptist Province. The college ceased operations as an educational institution in 1981 and later became a residence for seniors.



Faceted stained glass portraying the Doctors of the Church in the Chapel of St. Leonard College

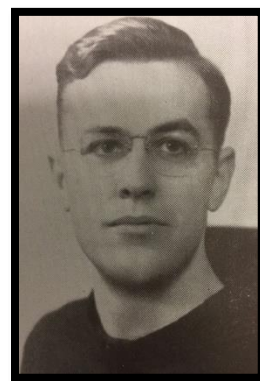
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1959: Friars begin at **St. Thomas Aquinas Church** in Avondale and serve until it closes in 1993. The church, located at **3 Burton Woods Lane**, was dedicated in 1936.



1965: Fr. Joe Rigali, OFM starts the “**Teens Encounter Christ**” high school retreat program. Fr. Richard Rohr, OFM follows as director.

1965: Fr. Andrew Fox, OFM ends his second term as Principal having served a total of 15 years (1946-1958; 1960-1965) – the longest tenure of any Roger Bacon Principal.



1970's: Franciscan Friars establish one of the city's first **local soup kitchens** at St. Francis Seraph School.

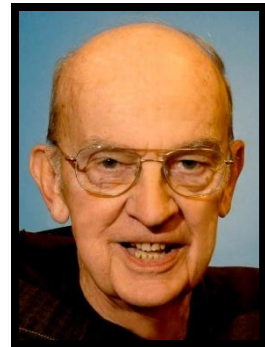
1980's: The **Bag Lunch Program** begins at St. Francis Seraph Friary to provide mobile meals which are distributed directly to those in need. This program operates in collaboration with a variety of local organizations who donate supplies and pre-packaged sandwiches which are assembled by SFSM volunteers on site.

1982: Friars assume chaplaincy at **St. Francis/St. George Hospital**.

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1984: The **Sarah Center**, established as a result of a record-breaking cold snap in January 1984 when women and children began seeking warmth in St. Francis Bookshop (1618 Vine Street), started as a "safe gathering place" for coffee and fellowship and evolved into a creative energy center focused on self-reliance and economic independence.

1988: Br. Conrad Rebmann, OFM, begins an acclaimed **community outreach program** at Roger Bacon High School. The program included "Bacon Buddies" through which students broadened the horizons and brightened the lives of students at St. Francis Seraph School. Their work was recognized by President George H.W. Bush in 1992, and Br. Conrad received the Joseph A. Kneip Distinguished Faculty/Staff Service Award from Roger Bacon when he retired to St. Clement Friary in 1998.



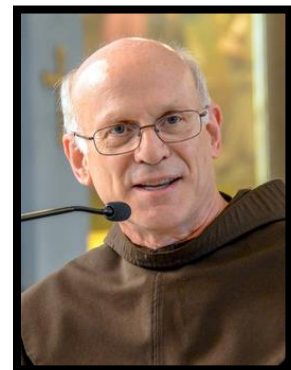
1990: The friars assume chaplaincy of the **Poor Clares** when they initially move into St. Vivian's Parish Convent and then in 1998 to the Monastery of St. Clare on Miles Road - continuing a 13th-century tradition of prayer, poverty, and enclosure

1991: Friars assume chaplaincy at **Providence Hospital**.

1993: Friars assume chaplaincy at **Our Lady of the Woods Senior Residence**.

2000: St. John the Baptist Province begins "**Sharing Our Charism**" program to send ministry coworkers, to include Roger Bacon faculty and staff, to Assisi, Italy.

2001: Fr. William Farris, OFM becomes the first President of Roger Bacon High School.



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2015: Roger Bacon begins the **Assisi Scholars Program**, supported by the Province and Franciscan Pilgrimage Program, that sends senior scholars on a pilgrimage to Assisi and Rome, Italy.

Right: Assisi Scholars in the Chapel of the Stigmata, La Verna, Italy



2017: St. Anthony Center officially opens on Liberty Street - named after St. Anthony of Padua, the patron saint of the lost and forgotten. The center operates as a "welcome center" for the impoverished and homeless, housing several key partner agencies: St. Francis Seraph Ministries (soup kitchen, bag lunch programs, and a "Sarah Center" for women), Center for Respite Care (24-hour medical recovery for homeless individuals recently released from the hospital), and the Mary Magdalene House (offers essential hygiene services, including showers and laundry facilities).



2023: The **Province of Our Lady of Guadalupe** is formed by friars coming together from six legacy provinces of the Order of Friars Minor in the United States: Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Holy Name, Our Lady of Guadalupe, Sacred Heart, St. Barbara and **St. John the Baptist**. The new province is headquartered in Atlanta, GA.

Superiors of the Custody and Provincials of St. John the Baptist	
Superiors of the Custody	
Otto Jair	1859 - 1862
Eusebius Schmid	1862 - 1865
Denis Abarth	1865 - 1868
Otto Jair	1868 - 1873
Ubaldo Webersinke	1873 - 1879
Jerome Kilgenstein	1879 - 1885
Provincials	
Jerome Kilgenstein	1885 - 1891
Peter Baptist Englert	1891 - 1897
Raphael Hesse	1897 - 1899
Louis Haverbeck	1899 - 1903
Chrysostom Theobald	1903 - 1909

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Eugene Buttermann	1909 - 1915
Rudolph Bonner	1915 - 1921
Edmund Klein	1921 - 1927
Urban Freundt	1927 - 1933
Maurice Ripperger	1933 - 1939
Adalbert Rolfes	1939 - 1945
Romuald Mollaun	1945 - 1951
Vincent Kroger	1951 - 1960
Sylvan Becker	1960 - 1966
Roger Huser	1966 - 1975
Andrew Fox	1975 - 1981
Jeremy Harrington	1981 - 1990
John Bok	1990 - 1999
Fred Link	1999 - 2008
Jeffrey Scheeler	2008 - 2017
Mark Soehner	2017 - 2023

In addition to serving in Cincinnati, friars from St. John the Baptist Province have served in numerous states and foreign lands. These include:

States	Foreign Lands
Arizona	China
Arkansas	Columbia
Illinois	Cuba
Indiana	Greece
Kentucky	Holy Land
Kansas	Italy
Louisiana	Japan
Michigan	Kenya
Missouri	Malawi
New Mexico	Mexico
New York	Namibia
Ohio	Philippines
Texas	South Africa
	Tanzania
	Uganda
	Zaire/Congo
	Zimbabwe